

Valedictory 1988

Faculty, Staff, Fellow Students:

It seems that as graduation nears, seniors spend more and more time reminiscing, remembering the good and bad events from both sides of the Atlantic. It was in just such a pensive mood that one week ago I stood above the mall on the Haggar balcony looking out upon a beautiful sunset. I recalled a similar setting, 3 1/2 years ago, when I, a hopeful freshman, stood upon that same spot and watched that same sun set. The landscape has changed since then. Now, the science building occupies what was once a muddy hole in the ground. And, the chapel rises out of a grove of trees, beckoning us towards it. But, more has changed than the exterior horizon; something within each of us has undergone some fundamental metamorphosis. It is this altered soul that we take with us from UD; more important than any diploma, what we have gained here is a proper ordering.

The University of Dallas has as its goal to educate the modern youth, to live, to prosper, to lead, in a complex world buffeted by many conflicting forces. This goal is best accomplished by presenting to the student the great thought of the Western tradition; these ancient thinkers offer many lessons in how to live and how to cope in an imperfect world. All of them study man in one manner or another.

Recently, the Sprueill Company was on campus preparing informative mailings for the school. In an interview with the company's representatives, I was asked what one thing I would

~~Say to my fellow seniors~~

say to high school seniors to convince them to attend UD. My answer was simple: come to UD and learn about man. This to me is the central lesson of the core.

Any such simplification is bound to sound trite, but we all now realize the importance of this knowledge. And, the lesson must serve us well in the world we go out to face. For, the modern world is not full of heroes to emulate or ideals to sacrifice for. Today, our leaders are persons of varied ~~weakness~~^{shortcomings}; many are corrupt and most are weak. There are no longer men like Aristotle who seek to discover the best form of rule. 1988 instead shows us Presidential candidates posturing for the popular vote while refusing to take a position on many crucial issues. And, religious leaders are falling prey to the earthly temptations that abound today. It is times like this that demand the education that UD provides. We have come in contact with the great in our four years here; we have heroes to imitate! We all can relate to Machiavelli :

In the evening, I return to my house, and go into my study. At the door I take off the clothes I have worn all day, mud spotted and dirty, and put on regal and courtly garments. Thus appropriately clothed, I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men, where, being lovingly received, I feed on that food which alone is mine, and which I was born for; I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask the reasons for their actions, and they courteously answer me. For four hours I feel no boredom and forget every worry; I do not fear poverty, and death does not terrify me. I give myself completely over to the ancients.

Letter of Dec. 10, 1513

We must take from our conversations with past masters the strength and courage to live life fully. Graduation does not

release us from responsibility; rather, it endows upon us the opportunity to enter the "real world" and make a difference, to put into practice what we have learned here. Many people complain that UD teaches no practical skills. It is, the common criticism says, a school useful only to those moving on to further study. I disagree! This university teaches the most important lesson - what man is and what drives him to act. ✓

From the very beginning, Western society has looked inward in an attempt to "know thyself." Each succeeding generation attempted to come to terms with what they were and with where they belonged in their universe. The underlying belief that gave this struggle credence was the fact that all humans possess some common nugget, some unchanging nature, that sets us apart from all other living things. The core curriculum, the Rome experience, everything about this school, prompts us to discover that internal bond, to understand man. We, the class of 1988, have come to know each other, to love each other. Every day we spent together in pursuit of knowledge brought us closer to understanding ourselves and our species. Our nights at Diamonds, our free time on the basketball court, our midnight rap sessions. Each has added to our classroom experience; each has led us to maturity.

This is what the Western Tradition has taught us. The project that the University strives to attain becomes especially important today, when other great schools abandon their mission. Even now, the Western Tradition is denounced as racist and sexist;

a vocal minority attacks Darwin and Dante, Jay, Madison, and Hamilton. Each of us has a responsibility to ourselves and to our project, for what the University of Dallas has begun has become a part of us, a responsibility to oppose such destructive tendencies. There is, of course, merit to the cries of these reformists; we cannot be so dogmatic as to deny all truth outside of our core. But, we must believe in our past! The lessons to be learned from the Western Tradition are desperately needed today; the world must have a new dose of virtue. We must defend the University's purpose, not because we have spent a small fortune here, not because we are now comfortable with such teaching, but because a proper understanding of man is especially required today. The 20th Century offers vivid proof of the destructiveness of mankind. Only through self-knowledge can such tragedies be prevented.

It would be obscenely arrogant to pretend we are now perfectly prepared to enter the world outside this ivory tower. Our education has only begun, and we are but acolytes on the road to truth. But, we have been well provisioned for our journey into life. This school has given us the proper footing from which we can march forward; we are, therefore, required to make good use of our training. If there was one thing the Rome semester taught me, it was perseverance - perseverance to find alternate routes when the trains were not running; perseverance to keep trying until I got a glimpse of the Pope; perseverance to keep speaking when my fractured Spanish did no

good. We saw the result of perseverance when our basketball team ended its 86 game skid. And, now we owe it to our education to persevere, to keep striving for our goals, whatever they may be. Some of us will be doctors or lawyers or businessmen; others will be educators. Many will start families. What none of us can be is a quitter. There is too much at stake for any of us to lose hope.

Looking back on my four years here, one conversation stands out as a turning point. I have used what I learned then many times, and it has carried me through many difficult situations. This conversation occurred early in my freshman year, as I pulled a library mail cart across the mall. It was normal to stop and talk to many people on those cross-campus trips, (I ^{though} hope Mrs. Wickham, my ex-boss, doesn't hear this) but I always especially looked forward to meeting Father Cain. On that fateful October day, I met Father Cain as he returned to the priory. He told me this story that I still recall every day:

A few years back, a plague of locusts destroyed every crop. The farmers had nothing to eat, but, being men of ^{great} strength, they ate water soup every day and survived. Soon, though, one of the farmers became distraught and decided he had to eat more than water. So, he picked up a few rocks and tossed them into his soup. He hungrily ate his new recipe. First he felt fulfilled and proud of himself. Soon, however, the farmer was in unbearable pain.

The moral I took from this story was simple but important. Whenever I feel overwhelmed, by work or pressure or depression, I stop and think and make sure I do not do some rash act that will only make things worse. This is a lesson we should always retain, just as we should always remember Father Cain and what he represents.

It has been the greatest honor of my life to speak to you today; I thank you, fellow members of the Class of 1988, for all you have done for me. We have become fast friends and mutual supporters; we have lived together and travelled apart, and my memories of you will never fade.

And, I ask you to join me in thanking the faculty for all they have done for us. (~~2-1-1988~~) Your teaching has inspired us; your faith has moved us. We all have a favorite professor, but each of you has treated us fairly and with respect; each of you has aided us in our attempt to grow. Thank you most of all for the living examples you have become for us.

Class of 1988, I challenge you, as I challenge myself, to carry on the process that has begun here. Every one of you has some greatness within; release that greatness and make a difference in what you do. Thank you and good luck in this new beginning!

Charles Bannan, Politics, B.A., 1988